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COMMUNIST AREA

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● USSR: Nationalities

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THE NATIONALITIES QUESTION TO THE FORE

Summary: In recent years, the Soviet Union has been hit by a wave of arrests of "bourgeois nationalists" about which a large number of articles, reports and authentic documents have appeared in Western newspapers and journals. Along with internal Soviet problems, the events in Czechoslovakia, the open conflict with the Chinese communists and the differences of opinion with Rumania have led the Soviet leadership to try to justify its nationalities policy once again.

Anatole Shub cited in a recent report from Moscow conversations which he had held with Russians. The following is an example:

[Should a war erupt between China and the Soviet Union] what will happen in our other border areas, where there are dissatisfied non-Russian nationalities? Do you know that more than half the prisoners in our camps these days are so-called bourgeois nationalists - Latvians, Lithuanians, Georgians, Ukrainians and the rest? I am afraid that - unless there is a radical change of policy, and we go back to Lenin's principles (permitting independence for the Finns, the Balts, etc.) - all these people will see the war with China as a signal to rise against what they consider Russian colonialism, although we Russians know that what it really is is Stalinism..." (1)

The Soviet leadership sees itself faced with the dilemma of either admitting that the burning nationality questions are now just as unsolved as before, or of going the traditional way. i.e.,

(1) International Herald Tribune, 31 March 1969.

of blaming foreign propaganda for the fact. Not surprisingly, the Party ideologists have decided once again on the latter. In their enthusiasm, they have even thrown some of Marx's and Lenin's views overboard; for example, the notion that the success of propaganda depends on the situation at which it is directed and that one must first investigate and possibly improve the very same situation at home.

The neo-Stalinist trend in this area has, however, led to a domination in the most recent Soviet publications of the usual distortions and oversimplifications. In an article of the theoretical organ of the Latvian CP, Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii, (2) reference is being made to Marx who said that the bourgeoisie uses national prejudices as a weapon against the workers movement and is doing everything it can artificially to stimulate and whip up nationalism and chauvinism. The example of "imperialist" policies in developing nations is supposed to show how adaptable anti-Soviet propaganda is. The author claims that under the conditions of a national liberation war the national consciousness of the former colonial peoples grows, while national interests and concerns are pushed into the background. The former sort of "nationalism" is then said to be a progressive manifestation and must, after the victory of socialism, be packed with constructive social content. On the other hand, the "imperialists" are said to support only the "reactionary side" and endeavor to prove that the national liberation movement has nothing to do with class warfare and that national interests incompatible with the goals of "scientific communism."

According to the article, anti-Communist forces falsify the theoretical foundations of the Soviet nationalities policy and "reject the international importance of a solution of the nationality problems in the Soviet Union" to their own ends. According to the author, criticism of the economic relationships between the various Soviet republics is the major argument for the lack of solution to the nationality problems in the USSR. The goal of the alleged misrepresentation is said to be "to take advantage of the growing self-assurance of the nations .. in order to isolate them from the socialist foundation and to steer them in the direction of nationalism and separatism."

Which Tendency Leads?

In the February issue of Voprosy filozofii two experts on the nationalities problems, P.M. Ragachev and M.A. Zverdlin (both doctors of philosophical sciences) speak on this problem. In a joint "rapprochement" between, or the independent development of, the

(2) Ja. Brolish, "Natsional'nyi vopros i antikommunizm," in Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii, No. 3/1969, p. 73 ff.

(3) P.M. Ragachev and M.A. Zverdlin, "Natsional'nyi vopros i antikommunizm," in Voprosy filozofii, No. 2/1969.

various national groups. (3) They elaborated on the scholastic problem of the limits to rapprochement of the Soviet nations and to the independent development of each nation. One must first keep in mind that these terms come from an ideological vocabulary of "false consciousness" and are, in the final analysis, completely without content. For example, the Party ideologists understand the word "rapprochement" (sblizhenie) to mean not the progressive process of the exchange of goods and wares, of values and realizations, of knowledge of history and of the present, etc.; rather in the Party jargon "sblizhenie" means nothing more than the propagation of the "second mother tongue," of the Russian language.

Among non-Russians the same term means a renunciation of the development of their own technological terminology, the dying out of their own literature and culture generally, a re-writing of history in the sense of the "long joint past of all Soviet peoples."

The opposite term, development (razvitie) is likewise used from the very outset in a reformed and limited sense. Everything which passes as reactionary and regressive should be wiped out, and "national peculiarities" may in no way bring along with them a "return to nationalism," or, as it is also called, "local patriotism" and "national limitation." At the same time, the authors admit that national peculiarities and general interests are not always compatible:

Only the upswing of the USSR as a whole provides the unconditional guarantee for the sovereignty of the individual nationals and their development. The predominance of internationalization serves namely as an objective foundation for the solution of the tasks in the program of the CPSU -- a further evening out of the material and cultural niveaux of the Soviet man and the arriving at the total unity of the nation.

The article concerns itself above all with cultural questions and confirms that, thanks to socialist realism, the intensity of the rapprochement of the national literatures -- in spite of different forms, styles and genres -- has increased. "And now the culture of the Soviet people is no longer simply the sum of the national culture, just as the Soviet people is no longer simply the sum of the Soviet nations. Here [we have] mutually penetrating parts of a unified whole."

Russification in Education Justified

In March, the fiftieth anniversary of the first autonomous republic of the USSR, the Bashkirian ASSR, was celebrated. Its

(3) P.M. Rogachev and M.A. Sverdlin, "O preobladayushchey tendentsii razvitiya natsii v sovetskoi obshchnosti," in Voprosy filozofii, No. 2/1969.

founding proclamation was signed on 23 March 1919 by Lenin, who shortly thereafter explained in an interview with American journalists: "We have given the Bashkirian masses the opportunity to found an autonomous republic within Russia and we support with all means the independent and free development of each people." On the occasion of the anniversary celebrations, many articles appeared in the Soviet press. The situation of Russification in the Republic is clearly set forth in Partiinaya Zhizni:

Here the parents have the right to decide themselves which schools with which languages the children should attend. The fact is notable that among the Tartars and the Bashkirs, as well as among other nationalities of the Bashkirian ASSR, one can notice the tendency to send the children to the schools with Russian as a language of instruction, although we have enough schools where the children can be instructed in Bashkirian or in other languages. That is also understandable; a command of the Russian language provides the possibility to participate in the great treasures of the Russian and world literatures. (4)

This conclusion appears a bit premature, for is it not possible that a normally intelligent person could learn both languages at the same time? Must the use of Russian as the nationwide means of communication force the mother tongues of the nationalities into second place?

In all of the articles celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Bashkirian ASSR, no mention is made of the fact that the Bashkir and Tatar intelligentsia proclaimed the independence of Bashkiria in 1917 and that the government which they called into being, with Validov at the top, made an agreement in 1919 with the government of the Russian Federation on the foundation of the Bashkirian ASSR. Validov, Manatov and other Bashkirian leaders belonged to the Communist Party. As they were forced to discover that Russification continued in spite of the revolution, they called out to the population to provide open resistance against the new leaders. Validov was defeated by the regular units of the Red Army, and he fled abroad with his closest associates. Under the pressure of the rebels Lenin decided to change his policy. On 14 July 1922 a new decree on the foundation of "Greater Bashkiria" (with Ufa as the capital city) was made, which should replace "Lesser Bashkiria." (5) Under Stalin, however, the recognition which had been won was destroyed again; the Yezhovshchina did not spare Bashkiria.

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(4) Z. Nuriev, "Pod znamenem Leninski: natsional'noi politiki," in Partiinaya Zhizn', No. 6/1969, p. 12 ff.

(5) Malaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, Vol. I., Moscow 1932, Col. 601.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution a dozen articles of varying lengths appeared on the nationalities problem during the October Revolution. Somewhat belatedly, in March 1969, Voprosy istorii KPSS published a completed list of these articles, accompanied by a general commentary. (6)

Especially outstanding in this piece is the discussion of the federal structure of the USSR. A number of the authors speak for the idea that the federal principle is outdated, while at the same time the journal as a whole is on the side of its retention. Its tasks will in no way have been completed with the "solution of the nationalities problem," but it will become an important factor for the national relationships within multinational states and in alliances with individual national states.

Conclusions

The articles which have recently been published on the nationalities problem confirm the following: the Soviet leadership has been forced into the defensive and is attempting to justify its nationalities policy with weaker and weaker arguments. Lively discussions on this topic continue in which various fronts collide: e.g. the chauvinists and the supporters of Lenin's nationalities policy. It is however apparent that the Party ideologists are not inclined to give up their long outdated and empty terminology, which in fact serves the aims of chauvinist great-power aspirations.

- (6) "Yubileinaya literatura o meste i role natsional'nogo voprosa v Otkryabr'skoi Revoliutsnii" in Voprosy istorii KPSS, No. 3/1969, p. 107.

(4) Z. Nuriev, "Pod znamenem leninskoi natsional'noi politiki," in Partiinaya zhizn', No. 6/1969, p. 12 ff.
(5) Malaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, Vol. I., Moscow 1982, Col. 641.